



Celebrity Athletes As Role Models

“As a father of two and an athletic trainer for some of the world’s most talented athletes, I know how important it is for young people to take care of their health and not smoke. Anyone who can read knows that tobacco can ruin your health and your life. But a lot of kids smoke because they think they look cool. I tell them that guys like Kobe Bryant and the other LA Lakers—they’re really cool, and they don’t smoke. People think Los Angeles is a really cool place. Well guess what? LA is cool because we have a smoke-free environment. I grew up in a time when it was cool to smoke, and I used to smoke, but that was many years ago. I was young and bored and didn’t have anything better to do. I’m so glad my two girls do have something better to do that’s good for their health. One of my daughters does ballet, and the other does gymnastics. They’ll tell you that ballet and gymnastics just don’t go with smoking. Sports and tobacco are the complete antithesis of each other—that’s an important lesson we need to pass along to our young people.”

—*Gary J. Vitti, MS, ATC*
Head Certified Athletic Trainer
Los Angeles Lakers



Gary Vitti, head certified athletic trainer for the LA Lakers, with forward Horace Grant. Photo by Andrew D. Bernstein / NBAE.

CELEBRITY ATHLETES AS ROLE MODELS

Here are some examples of programs featuring celebrity athletes:

**American Cancer Society
Eastern Division
(New York and New Jersey)
(518) 438-7841, ext. 316**

International superstar and martial arts expert Jackie Chan has joined forces with the American Cancer Society and the Taiwan John Tung Foundation to deliver some butt-kicking messages about tobacco. The advertising campaign was launched on July 25, 2001, when Jackie Chan participated in the “Strike Back Against Tobacco Festival” in New York City. The American Cancer Society used the high-profile event to send the message that Big Tobacco is targeting and addicting young people. The festival featured educational videos, tobacco-free youth advocacy groups, and interactive street theater. The Strike Back Against Tobacco campaign is initially focusing on the New York City market by using outdoor paid advertisements. However, efforts are under way to collaborate with other organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to help spread the message as widely as possible. The American Cancer Society also is working to integrate these pro-health campaign messages into its youth programs. Generation Fit, for example, is a program that seeks to increase youth involvement in nutrition and physical activities. The New York State College Alliance Against Tobacco is building a network of campus advocacy groups to fight the tobacco industry’s influence on youth and to push for tobacco control policies such as smoke-free dorms and sporting events.





Kids at the Tobacco-Free Basketball Clinic, led by the Wichita State University's Shockers.

**Tobacco-Free Basketball,
Hockey, and Soccer Clinics**
American Cancer Society
Wichita, Kansas
(316) 265-3400, ext. 116, or
(800) 478-4788

Boys and girls 6–12 years old jump at the chance to learn from their local idols—players with the Wichita State University's Shockers basketball team and the Wichita Thunder hockey team. These free clinics require that at least one parent per child attend and encourage coaches to be on hand as well. Thus, the tobacco-free messages reach not only the children, but also the adults they look up to the most. Team members and sports medicine athletic trainers teach kids about sportsmanship, teamwork, nutrition, injury prevention, basketball and hockey techniques, and “how to be a champion by taking care of your body”—with a strong emphasis on avoiding tobacco. In addition, kids 6–14 years old can participate in the “Dribble, Pass & Shoot” soccer clinics and games. The winners get to compete for the Major League Soccer national title.

Tom Malchow Ads
American Lung Association
of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota
(651) 268-7582

In print ads that are part of the “Secondhand smoke...does NOT build champions” campaign, Olympic gold medalist and Minnesota native Tom Malchow notes that secondhand smoke makes his asthma worse. He asks people not to smoke around their kids, our future champions.

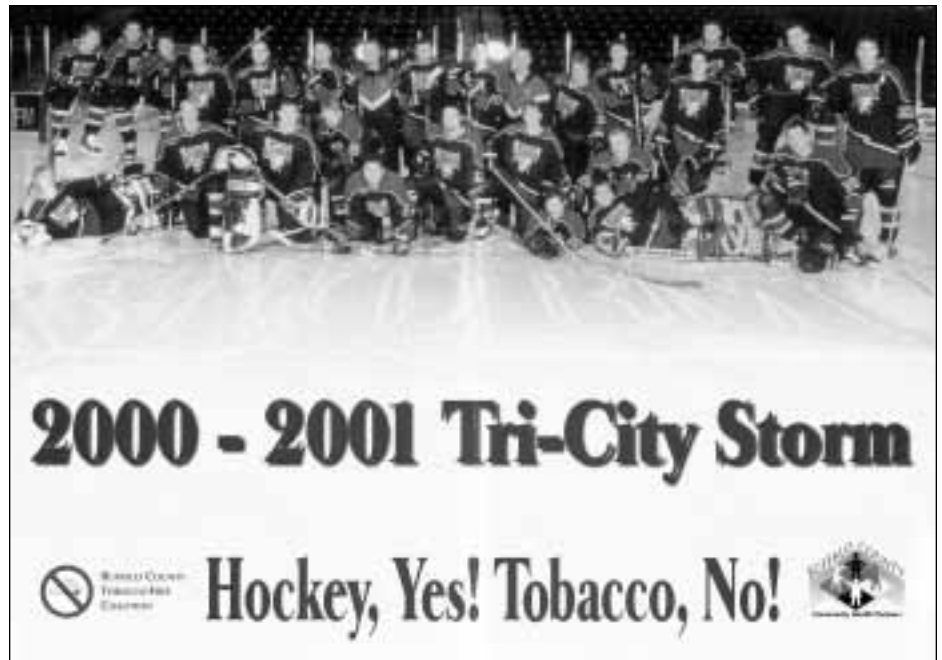
Sports Posters
Minnesota Smoke-Free Kids
and Soccer
Minnesota Department of Health
St. Paul, Minnesota
(651) 281-9801

With help from its partners, the Minnesota Department of Health has signed on some of the state's highest profile athletes to be role models in the tobacco-free sports movement. The Minnesota Thunder men's soccer goalkeeper, John Swallen, is featured on a new tobacco-free poster targeting youth. Also supporting the smoke-free movement are WNBA star Kristen Folk of the Lynx, NBA star Bobby Jackson of the Timberwolves, and Kirby Puckett of the Minnesota Twins. The Minnesota Twins paid half of the cost to have 100,000 of the Kirby Puckett posters printed, and team members gave them away during a special poster night at a Twins game. Minnesota Smoke-Free Kids and Soccer is developing special materials for Hmong- and Spanish-speaking youth players and coaches and works with other groups to promote tobacco-free messages and policies. Collaborators include the Minnesota Youth Soccer Association, Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Minnesota, and Tobacco-Free Youth Recreation. (See Policies that Kick Butt, page 3.)

**Celebrity Hockey, Baseball,
Softball, and Soccer Stars
Nebraska Buffalo County
Tobacco-Free Coalition and
Buffalo County Community
Health Partners
Division of Health Promotion
and Education
Nebraska Health and Human
Services System
Lincoln, Nebraska
(402) 471-2101**

Tri-City Storm players have joined the tobacco-free bandwagon in a big way. The players appear in a poster that proclaims “Hockey, Yes! Tobacco, No!” They distribute the posters at schools and special events. The Nebraska Buffalo County Tobacco-Free Coalition also has sponsored a Storm game and produced public service announcements, radio ads, and billboards. In addition, the coalition bought the rights to place its name and the “You Smoke, I Choke” slogan on 50,000 popcorn bags sold at the Storm games.

In rural areas of Nebraska, high school athletes and coaches are the stars of tobacco-free activities. They wear T-shirts with an anti-tobacco message and make on-the-field presentations to Little League Baseball teams, girls’ softball teams, and boys’ and girls’ soccer teams about the dangers of using tobacco. Their presentations have attracted positive media coverage by TV and radio stations as well as newspapers. The program has been so successful that three other rural Nebraska communities have replicated it. The coalition is now striving to improve tobacco-free policies for teams, coaches, and spectators so that tobacco use is banned during practice and play.



Players on the Tri-City Storm Hockey Team are role models for kids in this anti-smoking poster, displayed at schools and special events throughout Buffalo County, Nebraska.

**Spokane Tobacco Free Kids
Spokane Regional Health District
Tobacco Prevention and
Control Program
Spokane, Washington
(509) 324-1452**

Athletes from the Spokane Youth Sports Association have teamed up with Spokane Tobacco Free Kids and the Spokane Shadow soccer team. Youth participate in an annual tobacco-free event supported by the soccer players and community organizations. The Spokane Shadow and Spokane Tobacco Free Kids also sponsor an annual Tobacco Free Day event where all game participants receive incentives to be tobacco-free. At half time, participants enjoy a tobacco-free skit in which the Spokane Shadow mascot and Ciggy Butts engage in a soccer shoot out. A Shadow player then talks with kids about the importance of a healthy lifestyle. This event includes children from area middle schools as part of their tobacco education and career education days.

“If someone tells you that you cannot do something, that is a better reason to try and work harder and prove them wrong. Bo also said that you should not do drugs or smoke. If you do, nobody would like to be around you because your teeth will be yellow and your breath will smell. If you do those things then you will die quicker than normal.”

—*Anne, 7th Grade*

“If you smoke, it will shorten your life span by almost seven years. Plus, if you want to be a professional in any sport, you are going to have to breathe with no troubles. Bo said that you can do what you want as long as you put your mind to it and never stop until you make your goal or become good at what you are trying to do.”

—*Robbie, 7th Grade*

“It is important to not do drugs or use tobacco because it ruins your life and your family would be so disappointed and never trust you again. Anyways, it destroys your athletic abilities. I love soccer, but I love skateboarding more. I want to try lacrosse. I love sports, so I’m going to stay away from drugs.”

—*Josh, 7th Grade*

“I want to be an actress when I grow up and star in movies. Some people have told me I can’t act. Others have told me I can. I have learned to let the bad comments pass but let the good and encouraging stay in my heart. Bo’s speech gave me a boost of confidence. I will reach my dream. Thank you, Bo.”

—*Hailee, 7th Grade*

Vermont Voltage Tobacco Free Kids

**Tobacco Free Kids
Vermont Voltage Soccer Team
Enosburg Falls, Vermont
(802) 527-2499**

Schoolchildren in Vermont and New York are being inspired in many ways by Bo Vuckovic, owner of the Vermont Voltage professional soccer team.

Since the team launched its Tobacco Free Kids program, Vermont Voltage players have visited more than 40 schools throughout the state and some schools in upstate New York. They talk with children about the importance of being tobacco-free, eating healthy foods, taking care of their health, doing their homework, being a team player, setting goals, following their dreams, and many other important subjects. Each child is encouraged to write an essay about being tobacco-free, and those who write the best essays receive Voltage season passes.

Team members also are proud that all of their Voltage game jerseys have a Tobacco Free patch on the sleeves. Because all Voltage games are televised, the patch gets wide exposure.

In addition, the Vermont Voltage soccer team runs a soccer camp during the summer, and every child attending the camp receives a camp T-shirt with the Tobacco Free logo. For more information, check out the Vermont Voltage's Internet page at www.vermontvoltage.com.

**Trajan Langdon Radio Ad
Alaska Department of Health
and Social Services
Juneau, Alaska
(907) 465-2780**

Skiing and dog mushing aren't the only sports popular in this state, where short days and cold weather limit most people's outdoor activities. Basketball is big here, and so is an anti-tobacco radio ad featuring basketball hero Trajan Langdon, who was a standout player at Duke University and also a star of his high school basketball team in Alaska. In the radio spot, Langdon emphasizes how being an athlete and using any form of tobacco are totally incompatible.

Schoolchildren in the Tobacco Free Kids program are inspired by healthy role models on the Vermont Voltage soccer team.



Soccer star Julie Foudy and her teammates on the US women's national soccer team appear in this poster to discourage youth from smoking.



**Indiana Royals Youth
Soccer Clinics
Smokefree Indiana North
Central Coalition
South Bend, Indiana
(219) 254-1571**

The Indiana Royals use these soccer clinics to reach youth in the community who are most at risk of smoking at an early age, particularly those in minority groups. At the clinics, players talk with kids about the ills of smoking and give them booklets, posters, and T-shirts bearing smoke-free messages. At the Indiana Royals games, team members carry around banners and give out literature as a reminder to the community to not smoke. The goal is to cut the number of youth who smoke

by more than 90% and make Indiana a shining example for the rest of the country. The budget for holding the clinics and furnishing the materials is \$500 a year.

**Tobacco Is A Dead End
Office of Tobacco Prevention
and Control
Texas Department of Health
Austin, Texas
(512) 458-7402**

The *Tobacco Is A Dead End* campaign created a media blitz and gave youth in south Texas the chance to boost their baseball skills and meet the White Wings baseball Team as tobacco-free role models. It also gave the health department the chance to network with the community and establish new tobacco-free partners. Thousands of promotional items were given away throughout the region via radio remotes, TV stations, local coalitions and volunteers, schools, and the campaign's main event—a baseball clinic. Children attending the clinic discovered how tobacco products would hurt their ability to achieve their goals in sports, how it is illegal for them to obtain or use tobacco products, and how using tobacco as a kid (under 18) would affect their driving privileges. The campaign had a lasting effect through TV and radio interviews with kids, White Wings Baseball players, the state's tobacco control specialist, and local law enforcement authorities who spoke at the clinic. The interviews were aired throughout the region, thus increasing people's awareness about the state's tobacco laws. In addition, some stations aired follow-up stories and special reports about tobacco use and enforcement of tobacco laws in the region.

Troy Aikman Poster
Texas Cancer Council
Spit Tobacco Prevention Network
Austin, Texas
(512) 443-1064
(800) CDC-1311

Retired NFL quarterback Troy Aikman is among a growing number of celebrity athletes who are using their status to encourage children to play sports and avoid tobacco. He worked with the Texas Cancer Council on a hugely successful campaign against spit tobacco. "I understand the pressures encouraging kids to begin using spit tobacco," said Aikman, a former spit tobacco user himself. "I hope that my speaking out about the dangers of this habit might cause some kids to think twice before they start." Aikman is featured in a compelling poster, which is available free from the CDC (www.cdc.gov/tobacco).

**Smoke-Free Kids and Soccer,
Baseball, and Lacrosse**
**Smoking and Health Coalition of
Monroe County and the Finger
Lakes**
**New York State Tobacco
Control Program**
Rochester, New York
(716) 442-4260

Nearly 700 boys and girls aged 9–14 have attended the annual Smoke-Free Kids and Soccer clinics, held for the past three years in conjunction with the Rochester Raging Rhinos A-League Championship Men's Soccer Team, the W-League Rochester Ravens, and various members of the Women's National Soccer Team, including goalies Tracy Ducar and Siri Mullinix. The event also has attracted many sponsors, such as Snickers, Sunbelt Products, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, and local soccer clubs.



Retired NFL star Troy Aikman appears in this poster warning kids about spit tobacco.

In the spring of 2001, a Smoke-Free Kids and Lacrosse clinic featured members of the local Major League Lacrosse team, and a Smoke-Free Kids and Baseball clinic featured the Triple A Red Wings (Baltimore Orioles) team. The soccer, baseball, and lacrosse clinics have the same format: Several key players speak about choices, health, and the need to stay smoke-free if you want to be a champion. The kids are then separated into age groups, and they rotate through the clinic, interactive displays on tobacco use, and skill challenges such as a speed kick cage. While working with the kids on their sports skills, the professional players talk with them about staying smoke-free, eating healthy foods, staying in shape, and being a good sport. Before the clinics, kids receive an activity booklet, which they fill out ahead of time to be eligible for door prizes. (See Materials That Score, page 43.) There are several activities in each book, and the more activities the children opt to do, the more opportunities they have to win prizes. In addition, each child who participates in the clinic receives a T-shirt, water bottle, and other giveaways bearing the smoke-free message.

**Arizona Tobacco Education and
Prevention Program (AZTEPP)
Arizona Department of
Health Services
Phoenix, Arizona
(602) 364-0824**

Sports and tobacco don't mix—that's the message kids get from stars of the Phoenix Suns, Arizona Diamondbacks, Phoenix Mercury, Arizona Rattlers, and other celebrities who have teamed up with the Arizona Tobacco Education and Prevention Program (AZTEPP). For instance, Diamondback pitcher Armando Reynoso, a great Hispanic role model for Arizona kids, promotes important messages about the dangers of using tobacco by working with AZTEPP, which produces Spanish and English TV and radio spots targeting Hispanics throughout the state. Diamondback outfielder Steve Finley is the official spokesman of the Can Kickers Club, which was designed to promote the "Smokeless does not mean harmless" message. Cynthia Cooper, the most decorated player in WNBA history, is participating in the 2001 season's "Super Cooper" section, which highlights active young people in the community at each Mercury home game. Also supporting AZTEPP is race car driver Billy Boat, who visits schools to present his personal message about the harmful effects of tobacco. (Also see Successful Sporting Events, page 23.)

**Through With Chew
Richard Meckstroth, DDS
Morgantown, West Virginia
(304) 293-5912**

As a dentist who cares about children, Richard Meckstroth has recruited sports celebrities, dentists, and physicians to help him warn West Virginia kids about the dangers of using smokeless tobacco. They visit schools, Little League teams, and baseball fields to give out pamphlets and posters about the dangers of using spit tobacco. Dr. Meckstroth recently placed a large yellow banner—spotlighting a can of chewing tobacco inside the circle-and-slash "no" symbol—at Little League Baseball fields and at Watt Powell Park, home of the Alley Cats Minor League Baseball team. At Dr. Meckstroth's urging, the Alley Cats and other minor league baseball teams have teamed up with the National Spit Tobacco Education Program to help kids say "no" to smokeless tobacco.